

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 09404 241413Z

46

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEAE-00 MC-02 EB-07 COME-00 TRSE-00

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

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TAGS: SPON PFOR MARR MASS LE US

SUBJECT: BEIRUT PRESS COVERAGE OF PISTOL SALE TO LEBANESE AGENT

1. SUMMARY. FOLLOWING INITIAL FLURRY OF FRONT-PAGE STORIES, ESPECIALLY IN LEFTIST PAPERS, BEIRUT PRESS INTEREST IN PISTOL SALE TO LEBANESE AGENT HAS, AS BEFITS INSIGNIFICANCE OF AFFAIR IN LOCAL CONTEXT, RIGHTIST, OR LEFTIST, HAVE CONTENTED THEMSELVES WITH BRIEF STORIES BASED ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY ON WIRE SERVICE REPORTS FROM WASHINGTON. THERE HAS BEEN NO EDITORIAL COMMENT IN ANY PAPER. END SUMMARY.

2. MOST EXTENSIVE ACCOUNT OF ORIGINAL STORY WAS THAT OF ENGLISH-LANGUAGE "DAILY STAR" JULY 23. UNDER FRONT-PAGE HEADLINE QUOTE U.S. CONFIRMS LARGE SALE OF HANDGUNS TO LEBANON UNQUOTE, PAPER WROTE IN PART, CITING AP, THAT QUOTE U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT TUESDAY CONFIRMED IT APPROVED SALE OF 14,000 (SIC) HANDGUNS AND AMMUNITION TO ARMY MERCHANT IN BEIRUT. AT SAME TIME, SPOKESMAN ROBERT ANDERSON SAID HE DID NOT KNOW WHERE... ARMS WOUND UP ONCE DEAL WAS APPROVED. U.S. EMBASSY GAVE ITS APPROVAL IN MAY, DESCRIBING DEALER, SARKIS SOGHANALIAN, AS RECOGNIZED INTERNATIONAL AGENT, ANDERSON SAID, ADDING THAT HE ASSUMED THIS MEANT ARMS WENT TO REPUTABLE BUYERS.

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PAGE 02 BEIRUT 09404 241413Z

ARMS WERE SOLD BY COLT INDUSTRIES. COMPANY SPOKESMAN SAID

SALE WAS IN KEEPING WITH U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY. HOWEVER, WHEN ANDERSON WAS ASKED WHETHER THERE IS OVERRIDING POLICY FOR PRIVATE ARMS SALES OR WHETHER DEAL SERVED GOVERNMENT'S INTERESTS IN REGION, HE SAID HE DID NOT KNOW.... KNIGHT NEWS SERVICE QUOTED CONGRESSMAN LES ASPIN AS SAYING SALE WAS ILL-TIMED AND EXTREMELY IRRESPONSIBLE. KNIGHT REPORT QUOTED ONE U.S. OFFICIAL AS SAYING GUNS WERE EXPECTED TO BE SOLD TO RESPONSIBLE ELEMENTS -- THAT IS CHRISTIAN ELEMENTS. HOWEVER, OFFICIALS COULD NOT RULE OUT POSSIBILITY ARMS MIGHT FALL INTO HANDS OF PALESTINIAN COMMANDOS....UNQUOTE.

3. LEADING LEFTIST PRO-PLO "AL-MUHARRIR" HEADLINED ITS FRONT-PAGE ACCOUNT WITH QUOTE AMERICAN CONGRESS REVEALS ARMS DEAL WITH LEBANESE QUARTER UNQUOTE, AND LEFTIST PRO-FEDAYEEN "AL-YAWM" BANNERED ITS OWN FRONT-PAGE ACCOUNT WITH QUOTE WASHINGTON ADMITS SALE OF WEAPONS TO LEBANON DURING CLASHES UNQUOTE. PRO-LIBYAN "AS-SAFIR" NOTED THAT AFFAIR RAISED MANY QUESTIONS RE DISPOSITION OF WEAPONS, MEANS BY WHICH THEY HAD ENTERED LEBANON, AND NATURE OF REGULATIONS THAT WOULD PERMIT INDIVIDUAL TO IMPORT ARMS WITH KNOWLEDGE AND BLESSING OF AMEMBASSY.

4. SIX OTHER PAPERS, INCLUDING LEADING INDEPENDENT "AN-NAHAR" AND LEADING PRO-EGYPTIAN "AL-ANWAR" CARRIED ABBREVIATED VERSIONS OF WIRE SERVICE REPORTS, WHILE ANOTHER SEVEN, INCLUDING INDEPENDENT FRENCH-LANGUAGE "L'ORIENT-LE JOUR" AND INDEPENDENT "AL-BAYRAQ" IGNORED STORY ENTIRELY.

5. ON JULY 24, STORY MOVED TO INSIDE AND BACK PAGES OF THOSE PAPERS THAT CONTINUED TO FOLLOW AFFAIR, BUT MOST PAPERS IGNORED IT. ENGLISH-LANGUAGE "DAILY STAR" AGAIN HAD MOST EXTENSIVE ACCOUNT. UNDER A BACK-PAGE HEADLINE OF QUOTE U.S. SUSPENDS EXPORT LICENSES TO PRIVATE BEIRUT ARMS DEALER UNQUOTE, PAPER WROTE IN PART, CITING REUTER, THAT QUOTE LICENSES WERE GRANTED WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE OF SECSTATE KISSINGER ON RECOMMENDATION OF U.S. EMBASSY IN BEIRUT AND TWO RELATIVELY JUNIOR OFFICERS IN DEPARTMENT, ANDERSON SAID. NO REPRIMANDS WERE CONTEMPLATED, BUT TWO OFFICERS INVOLVED IN SALE WOULD BE TOLD THEY HAD ACTED IMPROPERLY.... THEY ARE TERRY GRANT... AND EDWARD PADELDFORD... BUT STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS WERE PRIVATELY APPALLED BY APPROVAL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 BEIRUT 09404 241413Z

OF SALE....UNQUOTE.

6. LEADING INDEPENDENT "AN NAHAR" WAS ONLY PAPER TO CITE NEW YORK TIMES AS HAVING QUOTED STATE DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN AS SAYING QUOTE DEAL WAS NOT CONCLUDED UNTIL AFTER IT HAD BEEN FOUND THAT ARMS MERCHANT WAS NEGOTIATING IN NAME OF GOL ITSELF UNQUOTE. PAPER BALANCES THIS BY QUOTING QUOTE OFFICIAL OF MINISTRY OF NATIONAL DEFENSE UNQUOTE AS SAYING THAT MINISTRY HADD EM-

POWERED NO ONE TO BUY PISTOLS FOR IT.

7. INDEPENDENT FRENCH-LANGUAGE "L'ORIENT-LE JOUR"
MADE INEVITABLE CLAIM THAT LICENSES WERE SUSPENDED BECAUSE OF
ZIONIST PRESSURE.

8. TWO OTHER PAPERS, INCLUDING LEADING PRO-EGYPTIAN
"AL-ANWAR", CARRIED ABBREVIATED WIRE SERVICE REPORTS JULY 24,
BUT ALL OTHER PAPERS, INCLUDING LEADING LEFTIST PRO-PLO "AL-
MUHARRIR", LEFTIST PRO-FEDAYEEN "AL-YAWM", AND PRO-LIBYAN
"AS-SAFIR" DROPPED IT ENTIRELY.

9. NO PAPER HAS DEVOTED EDITORIAL COMMENT TO AFFAIR.
GODLEY

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